

Planning Guide for Intragovernmental Partnerships



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The planning guide for partnerships is designed for early childhood state system leaders who are strengthening current intragovernmental relationships or creating new strategic partnerships in support of their early childhood care and education (ECCE) systems-building work. An engagement framework, along with worksheets to apply this framework to existing or proposed partnerships, is provided to ensure that the engagement framework used in the partnership is most effective in reaching the purpose and system goals.

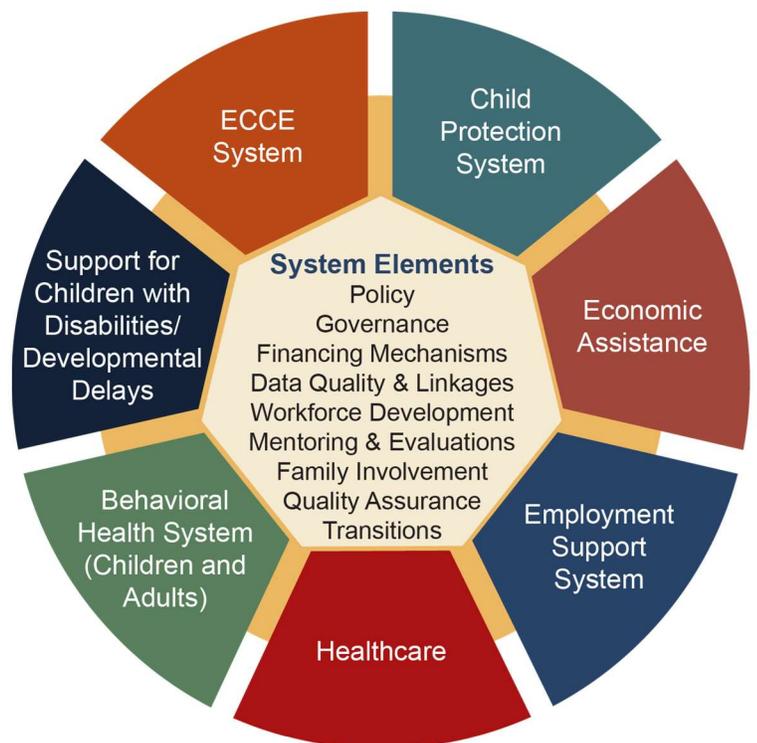
The Necessity of Intragovernmental Partnerships

Partnerships are an essential element of successful ECCE systems-building. As described in the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) initiative, “strategic partnerships describe a union between two or more entities to better achieve an agreed-upon common goal and a shared vision for an early childhood mixed delivery system (MDS). Strategic partnerships are long-term relationships and a part of the MDS infrastructure.”

(Meloy, B., Thornburg, K. R., & Peyton, S. (2021) Strategic Partnerships in Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five Renewal Applications. SRI International.)

Programs within the ECCE systems at the heart of PDG B-5 are embedded in a variety of state governance structures. Each state operates under its own unique governance structure. In most states, though, ECCE systems and services for children and families are spread across multiple government agencies, divisions, and organizations, in addition to the other systems and services that have a profound impact on early childhood development (Figure 1).

Figure 1. State Systems Impacting Prenatal to Five



Source. Administration for Children and Families (n.d.).

Whether working to achieve systemic improvements for ECCE or broader systems, the creation of strategic partnerships is essential. Even when ECCE or broader systems are within the same agency, such as a large health and human services department, they may operate under different leaders, and partnerships may require a formalized and ongoing effort. Partnerships with programs outside of the agency require a similar commitment. For purposes of this guide, we focus on intragovernmental partnerships that are essential to developing a comprehensive ECCE system. While other partnerships, such as those between public-private entities, are important to systems building, this guide focuses on ensuring maximum involvement across government agencies.

Purpose, Organization, and Use of the Guide for Intragovernmental Partnerships

This guide is for state system leaders who are already involved in intragovernmental partnerships, or are considering new partnerships, as part of their ECCE systems-building work. Leaders can use the worksheets to assist staff in reviewing whether they have selected the right engagement framework for an existing intragovernmental partnership, or in identifying the right engagement framework at the beginning of a new intragovernmental partnership. The worksheets incorporate the well-established conceptual framework of communication, coordination, and collaboration as the engagement framework for intragovernmental partnerships. Thus, they prompt users to think about partnership project purpose and about whether a partnership characterized by communication, coordination, or collaboration will best facilitate the defined partnership purpose and systems goals.

After the section on key characteristics of communication, coordination, and collaboration, there are two worksheets. The first worksheet aids state system leaders in examining funding streams and programs that are part of the state comprehensive ECCE system or that impact the development of young children. The second worksheet is to help leaders review a current or proposed intragovernmental partnership to determine the degree of alignment between the partnership approach and the work being done. It details how to score and apply the worksheet to the work. Before using the second worksheet, it is critical to define the purpose of the project that creates the intragovernmental partnership.

Key Characteristics of Communication, Coordination, and Collaboration

Establishing a mutually respectful and beneficial engagement framework is essential for strategic partnerships. For the purposes of the *Guide for Intragovernmental Partnerships*, the key characteristics of communication, coordination, and collaboration are noted below (Table 1).

Table 1. Key Characteristics of an Engagement Framework for Intragovernmental Partnerships

Engagement Framework Type		
Communication/Networking	Coordination	Collaboration/Co-Creation
<p>Goal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To exchange information and ideas 	<p>Goal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To share plans and progress on design or implementation, and to listen for and consider other viewpoints in the work 	<p>Goal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To share ideas, co-create, and co-decide
<p>Key characteristics and best practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing plans and activities Sharing updates Communicating in a timely manner Building awareness and understanding Maximizing independence among participants Partner not expected to modify their work 	<p>Key characteristics and best practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying a shared goal or purpose Sharing plans and seeking feedback Sharing implementation progress and seeking feedback Listening for viewpoints of partners with hope to incorporate feedback Working harmoniously together Partners making independent decisions, taking into account their exchange of information, ideas, and progress Full alignment of planning, implementation, and reporting not expected 	<p>Key characteristics and best practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying a shared goal or purpose Working together to define a shared goal or purpose Organizing together to achieve the shared goal or purpose Mutual investment required Shared decision-making Shared planning Shared implementation Shared reporting Leveraging synergistic and complementary interests

Source. Markowitz et al. (2003); Prevention Solutions@EDC (n.d.).

Distinguishing between coordination and collaboration can be difficult. In *The 3C's: Communicate, Coordinate, Collaborate; Doing Together What We Can't Do Alone*, Markowitz et al. (2003) differentiate between coordination and collaboration as follows:

Full collaboration is a partnership to develop or implement a joint project or plan. Whereas in a coordinated effort participants pursue their own goals but link or synchronize those goals with the goals of others, a collaborative project has shared goals developed by all members of the collaboration. A collaborative project is often the result of answering the question, what can we accomplish together that we can't do alone? (p. 9)

Worksheet 1: Identifying Intragovernmental Partners

State system leaders can scan the programs below to determine which intersect with their ECCE systems-building initiative. Then, they can prioritize these programs across existing or proposed partnerships, using the tables that follow. Leaders may also identify programs beyond those on this list that are relevant to their comprehensive ECCE systems-building efforts.

- Arts and culture programs
- Child Abuse Prevention
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
- Child Care: Child care assistance
- Child Care: Professional development
- Child Care: Licensing
- Child Care: Quality improvement (e.g., QRIS)
- Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)
- Child welfare
- Community health centers
- Domestic violence
- Drug and alcohol treatment
- Early Head Start
- Early Intervention Part C
- Economic development
- Head Start
- Health care
- Healthy Start
- Home visiting (e.g., MIECHV, Family Connects, Healthy Families America, Nurse Family Partnership, Parent Child Plus, Parents as Teachers)
- Homeless services
- Housing
- Immigrant and refugee services
- Library services
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
- Maternal and Child Health
- Medicaid
- Mental health
- Newborn screening
- Parenting support
- Prekindergarten
- Prenatal and postpartum health care
- Preschool Special Education
- Primary pediatric care
- Resource and Referral (e.g., 211, Help Me Grow, etc.)
- SNAP
- TANF
- Universities
- WIC
- Women's health services
- Workforce development

Important but lower priority programs that intersect with ECCE systems-building initiative	Current or proposed partnership purpose	Intragovernmental partner responsible for this program	Other intragovernmental partners in existing or potential strategic partnership

Critical but medium priority programs that intersect with ECCE systems-building initiative	Current or proposed partnership purpose	Intragovernmental partner responsible for this program	Other intragovernmental partners in existing or potential strategic partnership

Critical and high priority programs that intersect with ECCE systems-building initiative	Current or proposed partnership purpose	Intragovernmental partner responsible for this program	Other intragovernmental partners in existing or potential strategic partnership

Worksheet 2: Assessing the Engagement Framework for Your Intragovernmental Partnership

Putting together and sustaining an intragovernmental partnership requires intentional focus on the purpose and an implementation strategy that will help to achieve that purpose. The appropriate engagement framework—communication, coordination, or collaboration—varies based on the project and partners. Whether undertaking a new partnership or assessing a current partnership, state system leaders can use this worksheet to identify the best approach, leverage strengths, and address challenges. It is important to consider the perspective of each of the partners. It is recommended that each partner review and complete the worksheet and that the partners discuss implications of the results from each partner’s perspective before starting a new strategic partnership or when assessing current status.

First, define the system goal and purpose for the current or proposed intragovernmental partnership. Then, use the worksheet to determine which column (low, medium, or high) is the best for each consideration. Place a check mark in the best column. There is a notes column available to add details or considerations.

System goal and purpose:

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Partners:

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Consideration	Low No/Not	Medium Maybe/Somewhat	High Yes/Very	Notes
There is a shared understanding of the system goal				
There is commitment to a shared vision				
There is commitment of decision-makers to the goal				

Consideration	Low No/Not	Medium Maybe/Somewhat	High Yes/Very	Notes
Coordination required by federal or state law, regulation, or policy is in place (use Column 1 or 2 only); Column 1 if no and Column 2 if yes				
There is increased staff capacity needed to be successful				
There is little likelihood of unintended consequences				
Active partners have been identified to successfully accomplish the goal				
Mutual financial risk exists				
Mutual organizational risk exists				
There is a need for a consistent terminology across programs				
Organizational leaders have prioritized the partnership and its goals				
Participants are prepared to handle problems and disagreements				

Consideration	Low No/Not	Medium Maybe/Somewhat	High Yes/Very	Notes
Partner organizations and participating staff are committed to the time to work together				
Partner organizations and participating staff have a high level of trust and commitment				
Partner organizations and participating staff have a shared commitment to input from impacted providers				
Partner organizations and participating staff have a shared commitment to input from impacted families				
Partner organizations and participating staff have a shared commitment to including perspectives that take into account the geographic and racial composition of the state				
Partner organizations and participating staff have commitment to equitable inclusion of individuals				
Partner organizations and participating staff share a common perception of the problem that is being solved				
Partner organizations and participating staff are willing to give up autonomy				
Program mandates, parameters, and priorities of partners are similar				

Consideration	Low No/Not	Medium Maybe/Somewhat	High Yes/Very	Notes
Project evaluation requires data from other partners				
Risk of duplication of effort is high				
Scheduling partners to work together is easy				
Shared resources such as technical expertise, space, and dissemination efforts are needed				
Staff know how to listen to one another				
Sufficient human resources are available across all partners for this work				
Sufficient financial resources are available across all partners for this work				
The partnership and its goals are compatible, desirable, and complementary for the partners				
There is a willingness to share the credit and recognition				

Consideration	Low No/Not	Medium Maybe/Somewhat	High Yes/Very	Notes
There is a willingness to accept shared decision-making				
TOTAL BY COLUMN				

How to Interpret Worksheet Results to Determine Engagement Framework

First, total the number of check marks per column.

- If the highest number of check marks is in the first column, the communication framework may be sufficient for the partnership.
- If the highest number of check marks is in the second column, the coordination framework may be the most appropriate engagement framework.
- If the highest number of checkmarks is in the third column, the collaboration framework may be recommended to support the likelihood of a successful outcome.

Remember that there is no right answer. Moreover, the approach can shift over time. Communicating or networking can be a good starting point for partners to build relationships and trust and can be as simple as meeting together over lunch or sharing newsletters. Building organizational relationships through either communication/networking or coordination may lay the foundation for greater collaboration in the future. Partners may choose to coordinate on one project but collaborate on another, or collaboration may return to communication/networking once a project is implemented.

Suggested Resources

Child Care Technical Assistance Network: [Early Childhood Systems Building Resource Guide: State Systems Guides](#)

References

Administration for Children and Families. (n.d.). *PDG B-5 strategic plan guidance*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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For more information on this and other early childhood topics please visit The Office of Child Care's Technical Assistance webpage at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/> and the Office of Head Start's Technical Assistance webpage at <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/training-technical-assistance-centers>.

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